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ABSTRACT

A study determined the effect of parental involvement on reading achievement of participating students. Subjects were 22 fifth-grade students in a Chicago public school who received parental involvement and 19 students in the same school who did not receive parental involvement. Subjects' scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were used in the pretest/posttest design. Results indicated no significant differences in reading achievement scores between the two groups. Findings suggest that, contrary to earlier studies, parental involvement did not increase student achievement. Recommendations include: a parental involvement program should be instituted; consistent correspondence should be sent to the parents from the school; and further research needs to be conducted with a larger population. (Contains 29 references and 1 table of data.) (RS)

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ED 398 561

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON READING ACHIEVEMENT

Patricia Davis-Kennedy

The Chicago School Reform strategy is based on the often repeated African proverb, "it takes a whole village to raise a child." Chicago School Reform is supposed to be aimed at reconnecting schools with families and communities they serve so that all key people who touch students lives can be mobilized to bring about school improvement and improved student achievement. Evidence has shown that when schools work together with families to support learning, children are more likely to succeed in school and beyond. (Millender 1988)

According to Olmstead (1991), there are five major levels of parental involvement. They include: 1. The basic obligation of parents
2. The basic obligation of school
3. Parental involvement at school
4. Parental involvement in learning activities
5. Parental involvement in governance and advocacy

The basic obligation of the parent is to make sure that their child receives an education, and they must be willing to assist that child in every way possible in completing their education. The schools basic obligation is to provide the education necessary for children that will enable them to be successful and productive citizens.

Parental involvement in school is necessary and displays to the children that concern is there, which will eventually lead to the positivism of the child, thus increasing student achievement. Parents that are involved in learning activities have a hands on concept of everyday learning that goes on during the educational process. When parents are involved in the governance of the school, they can give input as to the rules, regulations, and policies, as well as the selection of the curriculum.

Parents want to know what is going on in schools, however, their interest in the schools should not be taken for granted. Principals must take a proactive role in communicating with the parents and let them know what they can do to support the school and the education their children receive. Specific items of interest to parents according to Kaiser (1995) should be made available. Parents want to know about student achievement - How is their child doing? 2. Curriculum - What is being taught to their child? 3. Teachers and teaching methods - What are the qualifications of the staff and how do they teach? 4. Special services - What special programs or services are available to their child? 5. Finances - How is money being spent at school and at their child's grade level? 6. Policies- What are the school's regulations and policies that will affect their child?

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This study may help educators see what they need to do in order to make their parent involvement program more meaningful, thus increasing student achievement in the process.

The research literature base regarding parent involvement in the education process has increased over the past decade, according to Young, Hunt and Day (1996) . Over the past years research articles and position statements have consistently supported parent involvement in the education process.

Research has found that children perform better academically when their parents are involved (Coleman 1991; Comer 1988; Goodlad 1984; Henderson 1988; Levin 1989). Although parents and educators may disagree on what the parental role should be (Cavazos 1989; Epstein and Dauber 1989; Lindle 1989) , they do agree that parental involvement makes sense (Chavkin and Williams 1988; Kearns and Doyle 1988; Rich 1988) .

Even though recent research has increased the literature base regarding parent involvement, Sharon Kagan (1985) indicated that the base lacks definition, sustained commitment and coordinated research efforts due to the complexity of this topic. Increased concerns about and an awareness of importance of parental involvement in education focus renewed attention on determining types of involvement and identifying appropriate activities. Seefelt (1984) cited early childhood research findings indicating that parental involvement increases children's achievement. A community involvement project in North Carolina reported a high correlation with child achievement (Graham 1976).

Research showing that when parents provide extra reading instruction at home, their children's reading performance improves was discussed by Shuck (1983). The evaluation of this program showed significant reading achievement gains for children enrolled in it. Steven Silvern (1985) completed a research review which identifies parental roles and practices that have been shown to promote reading readiness, receptivity to reading instruction, and increased achievement in reading. This study reemphasized the importance of parental roles and interaction with their children as a means of improving achievement.

A review of the research on the effects of parental influence and parental involvement (Nebor 1986) on children's reading achievement indicates that when parents take an active part in their child's education the results often turn out well for the student. Studies show that parental role modeling will improve a child's reading ability because the child sees reinforcement of the value of education outside of school. Parents who read books and magazines as leisure activities are more likely to have children with a high degree of interest in literature and reading. Nebor concluded that the more help a child receives from his/her parents and the more prepared they are to help their child, the better the child's reading achievement.

Becky Miller's (1986) review of research data included 35 studies dealing with parents and their interaction with their children in various ways. Results of the review indicated that children's achievement can be increased through parental involvement and parent-teacher interaction. Completed parent attitude surveys revealed that most parents want to involved in their children's education. Reading to children and listening to them read for ten minutes daily were found to be the most significant was parents could increase their children's achievement. Other results showed that educating parents to guide their children's reading at home often increases children's reading achievement.

In the research by C.E. Snow (1983), it was found that there was "a significant number of children, even those whose intelligence is in the normal or above average range, fail at or have great difficulty in learning to read."

In considering ways to improve achievement, teachers should give particular attention to the involvement of parents. Research also indicates that the factors associated with a child's parents, family, or home environment have a greater impact on achievement than do school related factors (Coleman, 1966; International Study of Educational Achievement, 1973; Jencks, 1972; Mosteller and Moynihan, 1972).

Henderson's 1981 annotation of 37 research reports provides evidence regarding the effects of parental involvement of student achievement in elementary and secondary education. The annotation covers the period of 1966 through 1980, that analyzed such variables as family background, and socio-economical status, parent powerlessness, parents' expectations of their children 's academic achievement, family and student self image, educational activities in the home, and parents involvement in parent-teacher associations and other in-school activities. The author concluded that the form of parental involvement in education, whether in or out of school, is not important as long as the involvement is well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting and serves to integrate student's experiences at school with those at home.

Gordon & Breivogel (1977) identified three important family influences that seem to determine achievement: 1. students' and parents' expectations for academic performance, 2. the extent to which they engaged in activities to support these expectations, and 3. the student's attitude toward hard work as necessary to success. These influences were based upon the Coleman's report of 1966. Coleman concluded that family background is the most important factor in a child's education. Kennington (1977) also reexamined Coleman's report and found that schools with an active PTA chapter had higher average student achievement, regardless of their social background.

At a time when budget cuts for education have eliminated many paid para-professional positions, parent involvement in the elementary schools can fulfill many needs. They can lead story groups, organize holiday parties, supervise the playground, work as library aides and much more. A school district in Phoenix, Arizona used their parents to teach 5th and 6th graders Spanish. They recruited their parents through the school

newspaper and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (Miriam 1993) . Another program used their parents to enhance communication of at risk children through reading aloud for pleasure (Wilzynski 1994) .

Effective parental involvement, especially of "at risk" children is one of the most challenging educational practices to implement and sustain successfully. When meaningful and effective programs are instituted, students, parents, schools and the community receive significant benefits which include: Improved academic performance, improved student behavior, greater student motivation, lower rates of dropouts, enhanced parental self worth and self confidence, and improved working environment for educators. Parents have always played a key role but, parental involvement has often favored the middle class families excluding the low income families or minority language families. The school must be sensitive when reaching out to "at risk", or difficult to reach families by using sensitive representatives who are prepared to conduct home visits and hold some meetings outside of the school to create a less formal setting. Sometimes, parents tend not to be involved with their children's school and education due to the lack of their education. Involving parents directly in school operations lessens parents distrust of the educators.

One of the most important aspects of any school parent involvement program is the provisions made for parent involvement in the school and in the educational process in general. According to Johnson (as cited in Schurr, 1992), parental involvement can transform school culture. Unfortunately, many parents question whether schools really want them involved. Schurr (1992) believes that it is possible to involve parents in a meaningful way and suggests that it takes an environment that invites rather than discourages participation of families. She cites seven characteristics that promising programs have in common as identified by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. 1. A written policy that legitimizes the importance of parental involvement 2. Administrative support evident in allocations of dollars, space, and people power 3. Training that focuses on communication and various partnering skills for parents and staff 4. An emphasis on a partnership philosophy that creates a feeling of mutual ownership in the education of students 5. A two-way communication structure that occurs regularly and consistently 6. Networking that facilitates the sharing of information, resources, and technical expertise 7. Regular evaluation activities that attempt to modify or revise program components as needed (Schurr, 1992).

Schurr also offers a list of proven parent involvement strategies that embody one or more of these seven characteristics:
1. Mutual goal setting, contracting, and evaluating to share involvement goals with parents; eliciting student help to encourage parental participation, and to keep parents informed of progress toward goals
2. Assessment of school policies, practices, and rituals to determine actions that might limit parental involvement
3. Parent lounge, center or resource room for use by the school community

4. Public information displays, public service messages, and work site seminars
5. Parent handbook of guidelines and tips
6. Weekend or public information fair
7. Parent and student exchange day
8. Extra academic credit for parent involvement
9. An old-fashioned family night at school
10. School-wide communication plan
11. Parent/teacher dialogue journals for communication
12. Official parent involvement proclamation
13. Monthly home achievement packets
14. Home visits for a special bond
15. School-wide homework policy
16. Meet and greet program to involve parents and students new to the school (Schurr 1992)

The challenge of communicating with parents has grown complex. One reason is that there is an increasing number of families where both parents work and the other reason is the increasing number of single parent families. To maintain a strong partnership between schools and parents, schools must keep parents informed about and active in educating their children. Kaiser has some additional suggestions for building this partnership:

1. Be proactive
2. Publish a school newsletter on a regular basis
3. Encourage involvement through parent organizations and advisory groups
4. Conduct an annual survey
5. Use "happygrams" or "good news notes" regularly
6. Make daily phone calls to share positive news
7. Develop video tapes of school functions, activities, and events
8. Stress personal contact with parents
9. Practice good listening skills
10. Beware of the needs of single parents
11. Develop discussion groups for single parents
12. Be on the lookout for new ways to communicate with parents

The bottom line of any school-community relations program is to help the children learn better, and they learn better if parents are involved. When parents are actively involved in their child's education, children tend to do better and feel better about themselves because they know that their parents care about their education. This can also help children become motivated to work harder in school and become high achievers. Children have fantastic learning ability. If parental involvement can do nothing more than decrease the harm done to students by feelings of failure, the total effort will have been more than justified.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of parental involvement on reading achievement of participating students.

Procedures

Population/Sample

The population for this study will include 41 fifth grade students. Parental involvement included 22 parents. All of the people involved in these research findings are from a Chicago public school. The parents and students are in the moderately low to very low income bracket scale. Most of the parents are not employed and are single parents. About eight parents are weekly volunteers within the school. The population is comprised of 100% minority students.

From the 41 fifth grade students, the school records showed that at least 22 received parental involvement while 19 did not. Since both of these sub-populations are low in number, all 41 students will participate in this study.

Each spring the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) are administered to each student in Chicago's public elementary schools. Two samples were identified from the school records of those students who had received parent participation and those students who had not. The students whose parents participated in the parental involvement program will be designated the experimental group. Those who did not participate in the program will be the control group. The reading results of the ITBS administered during the spring of the 1995 and 1996 school year will be used in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine the comparative pre-test to posttest reading achievement gains of the experimental and control groups. The pre-test/posttest design will be employed.

The finding will be tabulated in terms of means and standard deviations. The t test will be employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between the mean scores.

Findings:

The samples for the study included fifth grade students of a Chicago public school. Each spring students take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). From these fifth grade students, two groups were selected. Subjects in one group participated in parental involvement (experimental group) while subjects in the other group (control group) did not participate in the program. Results from the 1995 ITBS reading subtests were used as a pretest and results from the 1996 ITBS reading subtests were used as a posttest. A t test ($< .05$) for independent samples was done on these two sets of scores to determine if there was a statistically significant change in reading achievement score gains after their parents participated in the involvement program. Table 1 summarizes the statistical analyses.

Table 1

Mean Gains, Standard Deviations, and t Tests for the Experimental Group and Control Group for Reading Achievement Score Gains.

	Reading		
Test	Experimental N = 19	Control N = 22	t
Pre-Test/Posttest Gains			
M	1.04	0.8	1.41
SD	0.74	0.63	

* Significant at the .05 level of confidence

df = 39 Test t at .05 level Table t = 2.02
1.41 < 2.02

The purpose of this study was to determine the comparative pre-test to posttest reading achievement gains of the E-group (those whose parents participated in the parental involvement program), and the C-group (those whose parents did not participate in the parental involvement program). As stated in the Review of Literature by Young, Hunt and Day (1994), parental involvement in the education process has increased over the past decade, and over the past years research articles and position statements have consistently supported parental involvement.

Even though recent research has increased the literature base regarding parent involvement, Sharon Kagan (1985) indicated that the base lacks definition, sustained commitment and coordinated research efforts due to the complexity of this topic. This has been evidenced in Table 1.

Examination of the 1995 (pre-test) and 1996 (posttest) reading achievement score gains indicate that the Experimental group and Control group were not significantly different: the E-group with a mean of 1.04, and the C-group with a mean of 0.8. This finding and other information about the E-group and the C-group which is shown (see table 1) permits the conclusion that the two groups were equivalent in reading.

Further examination of the 1995/1996 (pre-test/posttest) reading achievement score gains indicate that there is no significant increase in reading achievement of the E-group and the C-group. The t score 1.41, also shows an insignificant change in reading achievement.

Overall, the data lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis: fifth grade students will not obtain higher pre-test/posttest reading achievement gains on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills than those not receiving parental involvement services.

The results of the study were unexpected in that the review of literature indicated that parental involvement does in fact increase student achievement. More follow-up research is needed as more students receive parental involvement services. This study might have resulted in different findings if the population had been larger, and if the pre-test scores were higher, thus being able to have a situation where achievement was already the focal point.

1. More parental involvement is needed school-wide in order to insure reading achievement score gains. This program can also lead to Math achievement score gains as well.

2. A Parental Involvement Program should be instituted by having staff development inservices to allow teachers to implement this program effectively.

3. Teachers should have an Open House at the beginning of the school year to introduce themselves to the parents, thus forming a teacher/parent relationship.

4. Consistent correspondence should be sent to the parents from the school.

5. Teachers should have an open door policy which will allow the parents to visit when time is feasible for them.

6. A Parents Room should be made available so that they may have a place to go, on the days they volunteer.

7. An end of the year appreciation ceremony should be given for the parents, as well as monthly incentives.

8. Recommendations for further research:
   a. school-wide sample/population.
   b. expanded subject research (math, etc.).
   c. longitudinal study of two-three years.

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